



Making Petroleum Contaminated Properties “Ready for Reuse”: City and State Action in Sayre, Oklahoma

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EPA recognizes that cleaning up contaminated sites alone is not enough. To get the most benefit from our cleanup programs, we have to help communities take the next step – making good use of now clean land. Three mechanisms that can facilitate the return of unused and polluted properties to productive reuse are grants, partnerships and new tools like “Ready for Reuse.” Through EPA’s Brownfields Grant program, we are making available approximately \$23 million a year to states and communities to address petroleum contamination. By expanding existing partnerships and creating new partnerships, creative ways for cleaning up and reusing former gas stations are turning these community blights into productive businesses. And finally, EPA is promoting innovative tools such as “Ready for Reuse” to help market these valuable properties to potential lenders and developers.

EPA Region 6 developed the concept of Ready for Reuse. Ready for Reuse is not intended to be a clean-closure approach; rather, it encourages cleanups that will quickly support protective redevelopment opportunities. As part of this program, EPA and/or the states provide a regulatory "determination" that affirms that the conditions on the site are protective of human health and the environment based on the current and planned future use(s) of the property. These “determinations” provide assurance to prospective lenders and developers that environmental concerns (real or perceived) have been addressed and the properties are safe for definable end uses. The City of Sayre, Oklahoma is the first community to be issued a Ready for Reuse Determination for addressing petroleum contamination from underground storage tanks (USTs).

In Oklahoma, communities and developers are taking advantage of a collaborative tool, the “Community Project,” developed by the state to assess and clean up properties contaminated by leaks from USTs to promote their redevelopment. In the case described here, cooperation among the City of Sayre, the Oklahoma Corporation Commission Petroleum Storage Tank Division (OCC), community leaders, and property owners led to unprecedented rapid cleanup and assessment of multiple contaminated USTs sites in Sayre, Oklahoma.

Oklahoma’s “Community Project”



To facilitate the cleanup and reuse process, the OCC regards affected communities as impacted parties that can receive assessment and cleanup funding from the Oklahoma UST Indemnity Fund, which is supported by a one cent per gallon gasoline tax. The OCC works with community officials and property owners to clean up properties and assure that they are ready for redevelopment and reuse. After site assessment, the removal or closure-in-place of all USTs and

cleanup of all leaks (if necessary), the OCC issues a no further action letter. With 19 contaminated UST properties currently assessed and cleaned up through this program, Sayre is an outstanding example of the success of Oklahoma’s statewide “Community Project” effort.

A collaborative tool developed by Oklahoma has led to extraordinarily rapid assessment and cleanup of multiple contaminated UST sites throughout the state.

On October 22, 2003, EPA Region 6 and the OCC jointly issued a Ready for Reuse Determination to the City of Sayre.

Historical Background of Sayre

Old Route 66 runs through the central business district of Sayre, a rural town of just over 4,000 people in southwestern Oklahoma. When steady highway traffic passed daily through the town, downtown businesses thrived, especially the numerous locally-owned service stations.



When Interstate 40 was constructed several miles to the south of Sayre, most of the traffic that had passed through town was diverted away from the central business district. Over time, with less traffic and fewer customers to sustain them, many businesses along Old Route 66, including service stations with steel USTs, closed down.

City and State Action

In September 2001, the City of Sayre asked the OCC for help in addressing these neglected service stations. The City had identified 19 blighted properties



With funding from the Oklahoma UST Indemnity Fund, Sayre was able to remove tanks from service stations like this one at 126 West Main St.

potentially containing USTs, most of them small corner gas stations.

However, enough time had passed that the original service station operators no longer owned these properties, causing the City of Sayre to be uncertain of the condition or number of tanks at each site. As long as the stigma of potential contamination from the USTs remained, the City of Sayre feared the properties would never be improved or redeveloped.

As a first step, the City partnered with the OCC and solicited support from community members and the owners of the neglected properties. City employees worked to gain the cooperation of property owners and to allow the assessment and cleanup under the state UST Indemnity Fund. The OCC quickly assessed the 19 sites simultaneously, which lowered assessment costs, and prepared the properties for cleanup. Assessments found that 12 of the sites required no remediation leading OCC to issue a no further action letter for each site. Assessments at the remaining seven sites found a range of contamination, from low concentrations of gasoline in the soil at most sites to a gasoline plume that had migrated off-site at one gas station, threatening two greenhouse irrigation wells.

The state UST Indemnity Fund helped pay for removal of gasoline-contaminated soil from several properties, four USTs from one property, three USTs from another, and the razing of a dilapidated building from another property.

Within 18 months, the OCC had completed the assessment and cleanup of all 19 properties.



Now that cleanup is complete and the building at 126 West Main Street is repainted, the property has been listed on the National Historic Register.

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Spurred by this progress and the desire to make other properties more marketable, the City of Sayre put up city funds to remove an additional 15 tanks from five additional contaminated sites, thereby realizing cost and time savings by leveraging the state's assessment work.

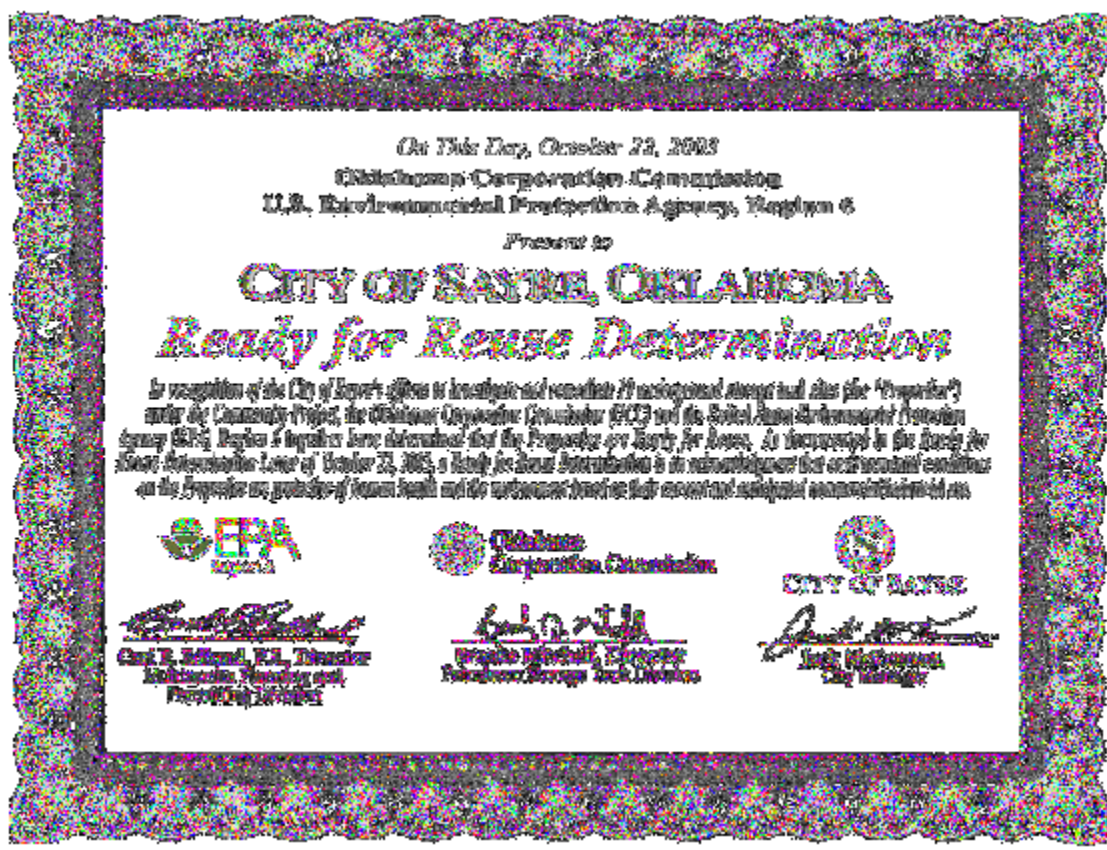
With assessment and cleanup of the 19 sites completed, the OCC moved into action to assure developers that the properties were suitable for development. On October 22, 2003, OCC and EPA Region 6 jointly issued a "ready for reuse" determination letter to the City of Sayre.

The letter stipulates that deed notices be recorded with the County Clerk, ensuring that future title searches on the properties would reveal the assessment and cleanup results. With the contamination removed, a number of the properties are now listed with local real estate companies for sale and are ready for development. To date, three business have located on these properties including: an auto parts store, a warehouse of snack food vendors and an auto shop.

Future Plans

With 19 properties ready for reuse, Sayre is leading Oklahoma communities in making the revitalization of contaminated UST sites a reality. The OCC is currently working with 12 cities and on more than 125 potentially contaminated sites to make the sites ready for reuse and the communities ready for brighter futures.

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<http://www.epa.gov/region6/ready4reuse/index.htm#sayre>